

## Sharing Knowledge: The First Step to Conservation Workshop

By Sharon Nance, Resource Conservationist, Fresno Area Office

As part of an Outreach Grant received from the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD), a workshop was held on Monday, January 30, 2006. The purpose of meeting was to open a conservation planning dialogue involving Tribal Environmental Staff, Tribal Council members, Central Valley Resource Conservation Districts, Resource Conservation & Development Councils (RC&D), Watershed Planners and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) personnel.

More than 50 people met in Coarsegold, California at the Chukchansi Resort & Casino owned and operated by the Picayune Rancheria. Twenty-three representatives from seven Tribal Nations joined with 12 District Directors, four RC&D Council representatives, a Watershed Planner and 12 NRCS staff. The seven Tribal Nations of the Central Valley Tribal Environmental Consortium served as the core around which the meeting was organized. Facilitated by **Reina Rogers**, NRCS State Tribal Liaison, the intent of this gathering was to familiarize all involved with one another's goals, priorities and their basic organizational facts in an effort to foster future cooperative conservation planning.



*Tribal representatives listen intently to conservation planning information.*



*Tom Wheeler Chair for Area 9 RCDs and the head of Coarsegold RCD.*

The facilitator began with a power point summary of the mission and operational responsibilities of each of the involved entities. This overview included a discussion on Memorandum of Understanding between the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Trust responsibilities of the Federal Government to Indian Tribes. Incorporated into the introduction process, a representative from each entity stated their group's goals, current conservation-related projects and closed their commentary by identifying both their current successes and frustrations. This information was recorded and then shared with the group to confirm accuracy. The morning closed with a video from State Conservationist Ed Burton showcasing several examples of successful Resource Conservation District (RCD) projects.

The afternoon session began with presentations on existing projects as a means of demonstrating Tribal and District cooperation. The first example described the joint efforts of the Coarsegold RCD with the North Fork, Big Sandy and Cold Springs Rancherias to field the first all-Native Envirothon Team. The second example, explained the work done by the Tulare County RCD and the Tule River Reservation regarding the management of the Reservation's grazing lands.

Printed information was made available throughout the day. Among the items distributed were materials on California's SB 18, guidelines on Tribal Consultation, NRCS Fact Sheet on Working with Tribes, the NRCS Tribal Scholars Program and RC&D publications on weeds and Living in the Foothills. Prior to closing the meeting, a discussion was held on the 'Next Steps'. A commitment was made by all to meet two more times in the next six months, with the first of the two occurring in March.



*Workshop participants engage in discussion with Sierra RCD Director, Charles "Toby" Hurst (second from front on left).*